

Message Text

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46

ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 ACDA-19 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07

PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 OMB-01 IO-14 EUR-25

SAM-01 SAB-01 SAJ-01 DRC-01 /135 W

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O R 221219Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2249

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 2362

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PFOR IS

SUBJ: ISRAELI DOMESTIC POLITICAL SITUATION

REF: TEL AVIV 2332

SUMMARY: LABOR PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE, HAVING DECIDED APRIL 21 TO PROCEED WITH ATTEMPT TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT, CONVENES AGAIN APRIL 22, 5:00PM LOCAL TO VOTE BY SECRET BALLOT ON ITS CANDIDATE AS PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE. FIELD OF CANDIDATES HAS NARROWED TO RABIN AND PERES, WITH MOST COMMENTATORS BELIEVING THAT RABIN IS LIKELY TO BE SELECTED. OVER WEEKEND, SAPIR THREW HIS SUPPORT TO RABIN AFTER CONFIRMING THAT HIS OWN REFUSAL TO RUN WAS FINAL. PUBLICATION OF SECRET MEMORANDUM RE-EVOKING OLD AND WELL KNOWN EPISODE OF RABIN'S "BREAKDOWN" IN DAYS PRECEDING SIX-DAY WAR, AT WHICH TIME HE WAS CHIEF OF STAFF, HAS PRODUCED STRONG NEGATIVE REACTION AND IF ANYTHING APPEARS TO BE CREATING SYMPATHY FOR RABIN. TONIGHT'S WINNER WILL FACE GREAT DIFFICULTIES IN TRYING TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT, AND INDEED MAY NOT SUCCEED, SINCE NATIONAL CONFIDENTIAL

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RELIGIOUS PARTY INSISTS ON UNITY GOVERNMENT AND INDEPENDENT

LIBERALS WANT NEW ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

1. LABOR PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE APRIL 21 DECIDED (283-170) TO PROCEED WITH SELECTION OF A CANDIDATE TO TRY TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT, AND AT SAME TIME REJECTED MOTIONS CALLING FOR EARLY NEW ELECTION. SAME BODY MEETS APRIL 22, 5:00PM LOCAL TIME, TO VOTE BY SECRET BALLOT ON ITS PRIME MINISTER-DESIGNATE WHOSE NAME THEREAFTER WILL SUBMITTED TO PRESIDENT KATZIR FOR INITIATION OF NEW COALITION NEGOTIATIONS PROCESS.

2. DEBATE IN CENTRAL COMMITTEE UNDERScored CONTINUING DIVERGENCE OF VIEWS ON APPROPRIATE TACTICAL COURSE FOR PARTY TO ADOPT. SECRETARY GENERAL YADLIN WARNED THAT FAILURE OF PARTY TO SELECT CANDIDATE IMMEDIATELY TO TRY TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT COULD FORCE PRESIDENT KATZIR TO TURN TO LIKUD LEADER BEGIN. KNESSET DELEGATION CHAIRMAN BARAM STRESSED THAT, GIVEN CURRENT STATE OF PUBLIC DISSATISFACTION, LABOR PARTY WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO IMPROVE ITS POSITION IN EARLY NEW ELECTION AND STRONGLY URGED EFFORT TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT WITHOUT RECOURSE TO ELECTORATE. IN CONTRAST, ALLON CHARACTERIZED EFFORT TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT AS HOPELESS REARGUARD ACTION AND INSISTED THAT THERE WAS NO ALTERNATIVE TO NEW ELECTION. EBAN LAUNCHED STINGING, ANGRY ATTACK AGAINST THOSE WHO WANTED TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT, DEFENDED ACHIEVEMENTS OF MEIR CABINET AND URGED THAT IT CONTINUE IN CHARETAKER CAPACITY UNTIL NEW ELECTION IS HELD. SAPIR ISSUED WARNING THAT NEW CANDIDATE FOR PRIME MINISTER MIGHT BE FORCED "TO WANDER AROUND" FOR MONTHS TRYING TO FORM A NEW COALITION. IN ADDITION TO WELL KNOWN OBJECTIONS OF NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY (NRP), SAPIR SAID THAT AN INDEPENDENT LIBERAL PARTY (ILP) LEADER HAD INFORMED HIM THAT TNDENCY WITHIN ILP WAS IN FAVOR OF NEW ELECTION AND AGAINST FORMATION OF MINORITY GOVERNMENT (LABOR ALIGNMENT-ILP).

3. ATTENTION NOW FOCUSES ON SELECTION OF PARTY'S CANDIDATE TO TRY TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT. OVER WEEKEND, RACE NARROWED DOWN TO TWO CANDIDATES TO TRY TO FORM NEW GOVERNMENT. AFTER WEEK-LONG PERIOD IN WHICH ONLY PERES HAD OPENLY DECLARED HIS CANDIDACY AND ALL OTHERS WERE WAITING TO FIND OUT WHETHER CONFIDENTIAL

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SAPIR'S REFUSAL TO RUN WAS INDEED FINAL, SUSPENSE WAS BROKEN ON APRIL 20 WHEN SAPIR ANNOUNCED THAT HE WAS THROWING HIS SUPPORT TO RABIN. AT DEDICATION CEREMONY YESTEDAY SAPIR, IN COMMENTING ON HIS SUPPORT FOR RABIN, TOLD ME THAT HE THOUGH " WE SHOULD GIVE THE BOY (52 YEARS OLD) A CHANCE," BUT HE DID NOT THINK A NEW GOVT COULD BE FORMED. AT THE SAME TIME, SAPIR RETIERATED TO ME HIS PREVIOUS STATEMENT THAT HE WOULD NOT BE A CANDIDATE FOR

THE PRIME MINISTERSHIP UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES.

4. IN ATTEMPT TO BLOCK RABIN'S CANDIDACY, EZER WEIZMAN (FORMER AIR FORCE COMMANDER AND CHIEF OF GENERAL STAFF BRANCH DURING 1967 WAR, SUBSEQUENTLY HERUT POLITICAN WHO ATTEMPTED UNSUCCESSFULLY TO UNSEAT MENAHEM BEGIN) THIS WEEKEND RELEASED NOVEMBER 1967 SECRET MEMORANDUM ACCUSING RABIN OF HAVING SUFFERED A "BREAKDOWN" IN PERIOD PRECEDING OUTBREAK OF SIX-DAY WAR WHEN RABIN WAS CHIEF OF STAFF AND OF HAVING BEEN TENSE AND PANICKY DURING WAR; WEIZMAN DECLARED THAT THIS BACKGROUND SHOULD DISQUALIFY RABIN FROM PRIME MINISTERSHIP.

5. PUBLICATION OF WEIZMAN'S MEMO IN WEEKEND PRESS HAS ALREADY EVOKED SHARP NEGATIVE REACTION. PERES HAS STATED THAT HE REGRETS ITS RELEASE AND EXPRESSED HIS PERSONAL PREFERENCE FOR A CLEAN COMPETITION. TRANSPORT MINISTER YARIV HAS CHARACTERIZED IT AS AN EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER ASSASSINATION FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES. EX-GENERAL ARIEL SHARON IN SHRP REBUKE STATED THAT SOMEONE WHO HAD "DESERTED" FROM POLITICAL ACTIVITY (REFERENCE TO WEIZMAN'S RESIGNATION FROM HERUT) HAD NO RIGHT TO INTERFERE IN LEGITIMATE INTERNAL POLITICAL STRUGGLE OF ANY PARTY. MOREOVER, SHARON SAID, RABIN DESERVED CREDIT FOR HAVING BUILT AND LED THE ARMY WHICH ACHIEVED VICTORY IN SIX-DAY WAR.

6. RABIN HIMSELF IN DIGNIFIED RESPONSE SAID THAT HE DID NOT WANT TO ENTER INTO CONTROVERSY OVER WEIZMAN'S MOTIVATIONS IN RELEASING REPORT AT THIS TIME AND STATED THAT HE HAD IN FACT ASKED WEIZMAN TO ACT AS COS FOR 24 HOURS IN MAY 1967 WHILE HE WAS RESTING FROM INTENSIVE PREPARATORY ACTIVITY BEFORE THE WAR, AFTER WHICH HE RETURNED TO HIS COMMAND. WE WOULD NOTE, PARENTETICALLY, THAT STORY REGARDING RABIN'S CONFIDENTIAL

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STATE OF HEALTH BEFORE 1967 WAR IS NOT NEW AND HAS ALREADY APPEARED IN PUBLISHED ACCOUNTS IN BOTH HEBREW AND ENGLISH. NEVERTHELESS, SEVERAL PAPERS APRIL 22 CALL ON RABIN TO PROVIDE FULLER ACCOUNT OF EPISODE.

7. AS TO IMPACT OF WEIZMAN'S MEMO ON OUTCOME OF TODAY'S VOTING, WE BELIEVE THAT IF ANYTHING IT MAY LEAD TO SYMPATHY VOTES FOR RABIN, ENHANCING HIS ALREADY CONSIDERABLE PROSPECTS. AT PRESENT, WE UNDERSTAND THAT MOST OF AHDUT AVODAH IS FOR RABIN, MOST OF RAFI IS FOR PERES, WITH DOMINANT MAPAI GROUPING LEANING TO RABIN. WHILE SURPRISES CANNOT BE EXCLUDED, MOST POLITICAL COMMENTATORS SEE RABIN AS FAVORITE TO WIN THIS EVENING'S ELECTION. ZADOK HAS TOLD ME THAT WITH SAPIR'S SUPPORT RABIN WAS CERTAIN TO WIN.

8. WHETHER TONIGHT'S WINNER COULD THEREAFTER SUCCEED IN
FORMING NEW GOVT HOWEVER IS PROBLEMATIC. IN ANY CASE DOMINANT
VIEW IS THAT, WHETHER CURRENT GOVT
CONTINUES IN CARETAKER CAPACITY OR NEW GOVT IS
FORMED, THERE WILL BE AN ELECTION LATER THIS YEAR OR
EARLY NEXT YEAR.
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